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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

*The Enemy's Rice Supply Situation in
Northern South Vietnam*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
June 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

**THE ENEMY'S RICE SUPPLY SITUATION
IN NORTHERN SOUTH VIETNAM**

Summary and Conclusions

1. The enemy traditionally has been hampered by food supply problems in rice-deficit Military Region (MR) 1, containing South Vietnam's five northernmost provinces. In the past, the enemy met these problems by augmenting locally procured rice - largely from coastal areas - with large shipments from North Vietnam. Now, as a result of the current offensive and the Communist dominance in Quang Tri Province, this situation has been altered considerably. Although Quang Tri usually meets only about half of the native population's rice requirements, an estimated 80% of its inhabitants have fled the province. Because this flight was rapid and unorganized, stocks of harvested rice probably adequate to feed all the North Vietnamese personnel in MR 1 for several months were left behind. The enemy will have to collect the rice and move it within the province to areas where it is needed, but such logistic tasks can be accomplished relatively easily. In addition to the rice in Quang Tri, captured rice in other areas of MR 1 will further reduce the requirement for rice from North Vietnam, thus relieving some pressure on North Vietnamese supply lines through the Laotian Panhandle and across the DMZ.

Discussion

North Vietnamese Food Supply and Transport Situation
Prior to the Current Offensive

2. Communist forces operating in MR 1 traditionally have satisfied their food requirements from two sources: (1) deliveries from North

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Vietnam through the Laotian Panhandle and across the DMZ, and (2) indigenous food production and acquisition. It has never been possible to quantify with any precision the amounts of food transported into the region in past campaigns or that procured locally. As a general rule, forces deployed in the rice-deficit western sector have satisfied their requirements from external sources, while units deployed along the coast have acquired their food from local sources. The necessity of meeting food requirements in this manner has, of course, meant a significant burden on the logistics system and large amounts of cargo devoted to rice shipments rather than military ordnance. Now that the enemy controls the rice-growing areas along the coast of Quang Tri Province, increased shipments of foodstuffs from these areas into the interior and western areas of the province could reduce dramatically the enemy's external requirements.

Current Rice Availability in Quang Tri Province

3. Quang Tri's normal production of milled rice, somewhat more than 25,000 metric tons, meets only about half the consumption requirements of its population. The estimated rice production and requirements for MR 1 for 1970 are shown below:

Province	1970 Population (Thousands)	Thousand Metric Tons			Production as a Percent of Requirements
		Rice Requirement <u>a/</u>	Rice Production <u>b/</u>	Deficit	
Quang Tri	311	47	26	21	55
Thua Thien	738	111	33	78	30
Quang Nam	991	149	42	107	28
Quang Tin	405	61	33	28	54
Quang Ngai	689	103	90	13	87
Total	<u>3,134</u>	<u>471</u>	<u>224</u>	<u>247</u>	48

a. Based on an average annual per capita requirement of 150 kilograms.
b. Crop year ending 31 May 1971.

Moreover, at the end of March, virtually all of Quang Tri's spring rice crop stood unharvested in the fields.⁽¹⁾ The Communist capture of Quang Tri nevertheless provides a significant source of additional rice supplies for North Vietnamese personnel operating in the northern regions of South Vietnam. Total rice stocks at the end of March may have been on the

1. In what follows, it is assumed that rice still growing in fields is not a readily usable resource to an army in combat. The focus of the analysis is, therefore, on what will be available from stocks of milled -- or readily millable -- rice.

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order of 8,000-9,000 tons. Vietnamese farmers traditionally have maintained large rice stocks on the farm throughout the year (for food, local sale, seed, and security). On the basis of analogy with available data for other provinces, farm stocks in Quang Tri immediately prior to the offensive may have been on the order of 7,000 tons of rice equivalent (most of it still in the form of unmilled paddy). In addition, Quang Tri normally would import from other parts of South Vietnam about 21,000 tons annually for commercial sales within the province. If one month's supply of rice from other areas was in the province at the end of March (in government or private commercial stocks), this would amount to somewhat less than 2,000 tons.⁽²⁾

4. Most of the Quang Tri rice stocks on farms or in towns were probably abandoned to the enemy. In part, this judgment reflects the fact that there have been no reports of organized individual or government attempts to remove or destroy existing rice stocks. Moreover, higher priority materiel - such as weapons - were left behind in the rapid evacuation of Quang Tri City, and it is reasonable to assume rice destruction was not possible under the circumstances. Furthermore, about 80% of Quang Tri's 320,000 population fled the province and almost certainly left behind most of their own private stocks. The 250,000 refugees from Quang Tri Province probably carried out no more than a few kilograms per persons at a maximum, or about 1,000 tons. The aerial and ground war in the province may have destroyed some of the rice stocks, but it is doubtful that the loss was significant.

North Vietnamese Use of the Quang Tri Stocks

5. Despite the fact that Quang Tri produces less than 1% of South Vietnam's total rice crop, captured stocks in this one province can meet the enemy's rice needs for a relatively long time, although some rice will undoubtedly continue to move into the area from North Vietnam.⁽³⁾ On the basis of estimates of North Vietnamese force strength in MR 1 and average daily rice requirements, the stocks left in Quang Tri Province could feed North Vietnamese personnel (plus the few thousand inhabitants remaining in the captured province) at optimum levels in all of MR 1 for 3 to 4 months without any external resupply. The only possible difficulties would be gathering the rice and moving it to areas where it is needed.

2. About one-third of this amount was stockpiled in Quang Tri City alone (the standard one-month supply for the city's population).

3. Most of the captured stocks are in the form of harvested paddy and must be milled before eating. Milling, however, is a simple process and can be done by hand. The North Vietnamese Army reportedly has used civilian laborers or sick and wounded personnel for this task in the past.

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Within Quang Tri itself and as far south as the North Vietnamese lines north and west of Hue (an area including most of the North Vietnamese troops in MR 1), there appear to be few logistic impediments.⁽⁴⁾ In the past, South Vietnamese sweeps have preempted some internal distribution of food in MR 1, but, at present, there is almost no large-scale ground interdiction. Although air strikes could slow a concentrated effort to redistribute rice, it is likely that rice transport could be sufficiently scattered so that only small losses would occur.

6. Present North Vietnamese control of some areas elsewhere in MR 1 (in particular in Quang Nam, Quang Tin, and the southern districts of Thua Thien) will further reduce requirements from either Quang Tri or North Vietnam. In these provinces, the major rice harvest was just completed, and stocks therefore are relatively large. Moreover, captured rice in Binh Dinh (the biggest rice producer outside the Delta), thus far helping to support troops in Kontum and Pleiku, could be used in support of troops in Quang Ngai as well.

7. How the Communists use the newly captured rice stores in Quang Tri Province will primarily depend on their priorities. They may continue to move rice south through Laos over the well-established road network rather than try to transport large volumes over the more formidable terrain within South Vietnam. On the other hand, a need to use the Laotian network to ship more ordnance and equipment could cause the Communists to rely more heavily on supplies inside South Vietnam.

4. There are clear precedents for Communist internal redistribution of rice in South Vietnam. Some transport of rice from eastern Quang Tri Province to the rice-deficit areas in the west has gone on for years. In addition, during the past dry season, several shipments from Binh Dinh to Pleiku and from Quang Ngai to Kontum were detected. There appeared to be few logistic difficulties involved in the latter operations.